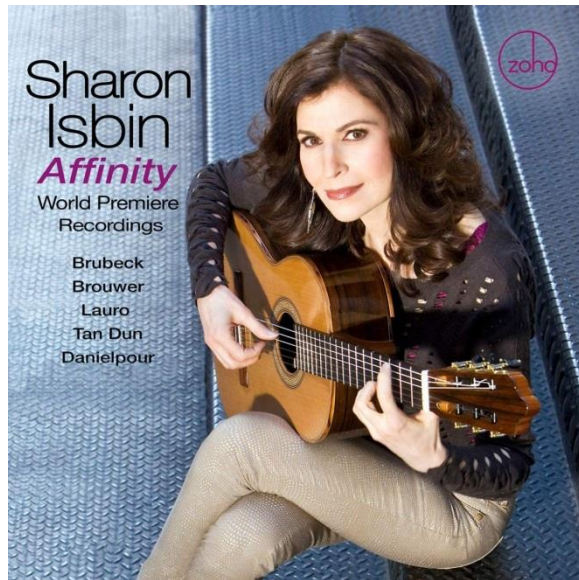


GRAMOPHONE

THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

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Sharon Isbin: *Affinity*



‘Affinity’ by name, affinity by nature, Sharon Isbin’s terrific latest recording evinces a wonderful talent for making fully hers what was written for her, regardless of style.

Chris Brubeck’s Concerto for guitar and orchestra *Affinity* is a single-movement work in three sections: the first bright, jazzy and energetic; the second, based on a melody by his father, jazz great Dave Brubeck, mellow and Chopin-haunted; the third a whirling percussive dance infused with foot-tapping

Brazilian and Middle Eastern vibes. Though Rodrigo isn’t far away, either. Aably accompanied by the Maryland Symphony Orchestra under Elizabeth Schulze, Isbin gives a sparkling, virtuoso account that neatly underscores Brubeck’s bountiful musical syncretism, while revealing a wider vista with smaller peaks and valleys visible in the distance.

Though smaller in scale, Brouwer’s colourful *El Decamerón Negro* for solo guitar also boasts three sections but its romantic tale of love and war achieves its intensity through intimacy, Isbin relishing the sweeping scales and arpeggios, the toccata-like textures and the programmatic elements. After a delightful interlude in the form of a duet version, arranged by and performed with Isbin’s former student Colin Davin, of Lauro’s popular Waltz No 3, Isbin returns to the subject of love with Tan Dun’s extraordinary *Seven Desires*, a surreal courting ritual between flamenco guitar and pipa, and Richard Danielpour’s three Rumi settings for voice and guitar, *Of Love and Longing*, in which she is joined by the soprano Isabel Leonard. Thanks in large part to Leonard’s clear diction and languid phrasing, we’re suddenly made aware that a more transcendent, spiritual love was with us on the journey all along.